It’s Okk Koko – An Incomplete Tale

Dedication

For everyone who's loved and lost, and still hopes.

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This is a work of non-fiction memoir. The events, places, and people described are based on the author's personal experiences. Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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Preface

When I first started writing this book, I wasn't planning to make it public.
It was just for me… a place to keep my memories safe.
A place to talk about what I couldn't say out loud.
A place where I could still feel close to her, even when she was no longer around.

This book is based on real moments — my real feelings, and our real story.
No imagination. No made-up drama. Just what really happened between two people who shared something special, even if the world didn't see it.

I've written each chapter with honesty — from the day we first met to the days where everything slowly started to fall apart.
Some parts still hurt to remember.
Some still make me smile.
But every part is true.

Many people think love has to come with a label —
boyfriend, girlfriend, relationship.
But I learned that sometimes the deepest connections happen without those labels.
Sometimes, a situationship can feel more meaningful than a relationship.
And sometimes, even when things don't work out, the love stays with you.

If you've ever loved someone silently…
If you've ever lost someone without closure…
If you still check old chats or smile at old pictures, even though they're not in your life anymore…
Then maybe this book is for you too.

I didn't write this to gain sympathy.
I wrote this because I had to.
To heal.
To remember.
To say everything I couldn't say when she was still with me.

This is my incomplete tale.
But maybe, somewhere, it will feel complete for you.

Thank you for reading.
And thank you, Aarohi… for being the reason behind every word.

— Koko

Prologue

This book is not a perfect love story.
It's a real one. One that started in the most unexpected way… and ended when I least expected it.

This book is not written to blame anyone.
It's written to remember.
To relive the moments that once made me feel truly alive.
To share the memories that still make me smile… even if they hurt now.

I know not everyone will understand.
Some will call it one-sided.
Some will say it wasn't even love.
But I know what I felt.
And that's enough for me.

This book is for her.
For the memories.
For the version of us that only existed when we were together.

And maybe, somewhere, someone will read this and feel a little less alone in their own story.

Because not all love stories are meant to last forever.
Some are just meant to be felt — deeply, truly, and once in a lifetime.

— **Koko**

A GLANCE THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Chapter 1: A Glance that Changed Everything

Sometimes, love doesn't begin with a grand conversation. Sometimes, it begins with a look—a single, unexpected glance that lingers longer than it should.

It was just another ordinary day in college. I was walking through the corridor when my eyes caught sight of her. Aarohi. She was standing with her friend, busy writing an application for short attendance. Something about her presence made me pause. Maybe it was her quiet focus, or maybe it was just something I couldn't explain. Our first interaction was brief—a

few words exchanged, nothing more. But in those moments, I felt something shift inside me. Something that told me this girl would change everything.

Days passed. I kept thinking about her. I didn't know her name then, but fate worked its magic. I came across her Instagram ID and, with a racing heart, sent her a follow request. I made up an excuse to message her—asking how to write an application for a friend whose grandmother had passed away. The truth? I didn't care about the application. I just wanted to talk to her again.

That single message turned into a habit. We began talking about random things—college, friends, subjects, and even silly things like food cravings and movies. Each conversation brought us a little closer. Even when I tried to act casual, I knew deep inside that every reply from her made my day better. I started looking forward to her messages. That innocent interaction became the highlight of my daily routine.

What I didn't realize was how much she was becoming a part of my world. Her presence was soft yet powerful. There was a strange comfort in her words, a calming warmth in her texts. I would smile without reason, simply reading her messages. Her emojis, her little "hmm," and even her silence—everything mattered. I had unknowingly started falling for her.

And yet, I didn't rush it. I knew this was something special. I wanted to take my time, to feel it fully. It was not just attraction—it was something deeper, something rare. A story was beginning. A story I never knew I needed.

"Sometimes the smallest moment becomes the start of the biggest stories."

FROM LIKES TO LONG CHATS

Chapter 2: From Likes to Long Chats

That one message turned into many. Our chats became longer, more frequent. And with every exchange, I found myself drawn to her even more. She was a year older than me, which initially caught me off guard. I had always thought of myself as the mature one, the guy who had it all figured out. But Aarohi proved me

wrong. Her maturity, her kindness, the way she spoke—it all left me in awe.

What surprised me most was how she treated me. In college, she barely interacted with anyone. Yet with me, she opened up. We shared thoughts, jokes, and little parts of our day. People began to notice. Friends would nudge me and say, "You're one lucky guy. She talks only to you." I hadn't asked for that. She did it on her own.

And every time she passed by in college, my heart would beat a little faster. There was something so gentle about her presence. I even told my friend Diksha, "Whenever I see her, I blush. I don't know why." And Diksha, with a teasing smile, said, "Teri choice badi Achi hai." That gave me the confidence to keep our conversations going.

Our conversations weren't just small talk anymore. We spoke about life, about dreams, and sometimes just about nonsense that made no sense to others. But we

understood each other. I learned that she loved chai on rainy days, that she preferred soft music over loud parties, and that she hated lies more than anything. Every little detail felt like a treasure I was discovering.

There was something healing about talking to her. On tough days, she would unknowingly cheer me up. She wouldn't say much—sometimes just a meme or a small message—but that was enough. I started relying on her emotionally without even realizing it.

I began to change without knowing it. I started caring more, smiling more, feeling more. She became the part of my life I didn't know was missing. And somewhere between all the chats, the laughter, and the good mornings—I started falling for her.

"Connection isn't always loud—it can be the quiet comfort in someone's presence."

A PHOTO

A MOMENT

A MEMORY

Chapter 3: A Photo, A Moment, A Memory

The day we took our first photo together felt magical. It wasn't planned, it wasn't perfect—but it became unforgettable.

After checking our answer sheets in college, a few of us decided to visit a nearby café. It was one of those small places, with cramped tables and cheap tea that always tasted better with friends. I found myself

seated in the middle, with people around me, but all I noticed was her. Aarohi. The way she talked with her friend, the way she looked at her tea—it was all so ordinary, yet it felt special.

We ordered Maggi and tea, laughed over silly grades, and waited. Aarohi sat across from me, sipping her tea slowly, cupping the glass like she was holding something precious. The way she looked at her tea, the way she tucked her hair behind her ears—it was all so ordinary, yet for me, every little move was mesmerizing.

At one point, the conversation shifted toward my ramp walk practice. Someone joked, "Bhai, chalna toh aata hai na stage pe?"

I groaned dramatically and said, "Bhai, itna chalna padhta hai ramp walk ke liye, poore din pair dard karte hain!"

Someone suggested we take a group mirror selfie while waiting. I remember her face being hidden in the first photo. Without thinking much, I called her closer, "Aaja na yahan, photo mein clear nahi aayi."

She looked up, smiled slightly, and without hesitation, walked over to stand next to me. And in that second, I knew—I would treasure that photo forever. It wasn't about the pose or the lighting. It was about us, standing side by side, smiling at a moment that meant everything.

In that moment, I felt something shift. She was standing right next to me. Close enough to feel her presence. We smiled for the picture, and the camera clicked.

It wasn't just a photo.

It was **our** photo.

That one image captured more than just faces. It captured a feeling. A beginning. A quiet connection that neither of us said out loud, but both of us felt

Even when we discovered a fly in our Maggi and had to leave early, I didn't care. That one memory was more than enough. That night, I scrolled through my gallery again and again. My fingers stopped at that one photo. I zoomed in, cropped it carefully—just the two of us. And then, with a racing heart, I uploaded it to my private story.

Not for everyone. Just for me. For the ones who understood.

As I lay in bed that night, I stared at the screen and smiled. That shy smile that comes when someone touches your heart without even knowing it. It was innocent. Pure. Real.

I kept rewatching the moment in my mind—how she walked over without hesitation, how her hair brushed against my arm as she stood close.

That one photo had changed something. It gave me something to look at when I missed her. Something that made my heart full.

In the days that followed, our conversations deepened. That photo wasn't just a memory—it became a symbol. Whenever I felt unsure about how she felt, I'd open it again. Her smile in that picture told me .

One day, she messaged me late at night, "Vo photo ache aayi thi na?"

I smiled at my screen. Just three words, but they made my heart race.

"Sabse special," I replied.

She didn't reply immediately. But a few minutes later, she sent a Red heart symbol .

That was the first time I felt like maybe—just maybe—she felt the same way too.

There were so many small things I started to do. I'd keep my hair styled the way she once complimented. I wore the hoodie she once said looked "cool" . I knew it sounded silly, but when you're falling for someone, even the smallest details matter.

That one café visit turned out to be more than an outing. It was the day we sealed a memory.

A photo. A smile. A beginning.

And unknowingly, I had already started falling for her

"Sometimes, memories are hidden in ordinary frames—we just need the heart to see them."

LAUGHTER, JOKES, AND BONDS

Chapter 4: Laughter, Jokes, and Bonds

Sometimes, the strongest feelings are built in silence. In the moments when we say nothing, but our hearts are full of thoughts we can't express.

One such moment was the day Aarohi went to the zoo with her friends.

It wasn't something we planned together. She had made the plan with her classmates after a lecture got cancelled. At the same time, I had my own reason to go out—I needed to buy a costume for an upcoming ramp walk event. Originally, I wasn't going to the zoo at all. But when I saw her status, a small part of me changed my mind.

I didn't tell her I was coming. I just made a quick plan with a few of my friends and went there. Maybe it was just a coincidence. Or maybe, deep down, I was hoping to bump into her.

And I did.

I saw her from a distance, laughing, pointing at animals, smiling with her group. She looked happy. Free. Glowing in her own world.

I stood there, wanting to walk up to her. Wanting to say something. Even a small joke, just to make her smile. But something stopped me.

It wasn't fear exactly. It was hesitation. A strange kind that comes when you care too much. When you're not sure if your presence will be welcome, or if you'll just mess up the moment.

So I stayed away.

I walked with another friend, pretending to enjoy the zoo. But every few steps, my eyes searched for her. My heart pulled me in her direction.

And yet, I said nothing.

That evening, our chats continued online, just like always. We shared jokes, memes, casual updates. But even while we talked, I kept thinking about the moment I missed.

I could have walked up to her. I could have made another memory. But I didn't.

It made me realize something important: sometimes, silence speaks louder than any message.

And sometimes, we feel closer to someone online than in real life.

Our bond kept growing. Slowly, gently.

With every message, we understood each other more. She got used to my silly jokes. I learned when she needed space. We teased, we laughed, we even argued a little. But there was always a feeling of safety between us.

We were building something real.

Even though we hadn't said anything about being more than friends, I could feel the shift. I started noticing the way I felt when she replied late, or when she didn't send a goodnight message. Her absence, even for a few hours, made a difference.

That's when you know it's becoming something more. When their little habits affect your big emotions.

I don't know when exactly it happened. But somewhere between the jokes and late-night texts, I realized I was thinking about her all the time.

Not just as a friend.

As someone who mattered.

As someone who made the world feel lighter.

There are moments in life that don't need grand backgrounds or dramatic scenes. Just a quiet space, a soft connection, and two people who are slowly becoming something more.

That zoo day reminded me that sometimes, what we don't say matters just as much as what we do.

Because even in that silence, I felt everything.

“Sometimes silence speaks louder than words, and presence means more than action.”

MORE THAN JUST A LABEL

Chapter 5: More Than Just a Label

As our friendship deepened, the line between care and love blurred. We had never said it out loud, but the way we looked at each other, the way we waited for each other's messages—it was clear. Something more was blooming.

We started calling it a 'situationship'—a word that tried to define the undefined. One day, while teasing her, I joked, "Ye sabh bas 6 months ka hai." She didn't laugh. I saw a flicker of hurt in her eyes. That's when I realized

how deep we already were. We weren't just friends casually talking—we were something more.

We started talking about things that mattered. Family, fears, the future. Even though we hadn't officially said we were a couple, we both acted like we were. We cared, we fought, we made up. Slowly, we started knowing each other at a level even words couldn't touch.

She taught me patience. I showed her that she could trust again. And though we still hadn't used the word "relationship," in our hearts, we had already committed.

Every morning began with a message. Every night ended with a good night snap. I started noticing the little things—how she tied her hair when she was stressed, how her voice softened when she was tired, how she used emojis to say things she couldn't with words.

We didn't need to say "I love you." It was already there in how she would wait outside my class just to walk with me. How I'd keep her favorite chocolate in my bag even if I didn't see her that day. It was in the way she would scold me for skipping meals, and how I'd get irritated when she didn't take enough rest. Love wasn't spoken, it was felt.

We became each other's constant. When the world felt heavy, we found peace in each other. On tough days, when nothing made sense, just seeing her smile changed everything. And even on days when things were messy—when we fought over something small or misread each other's tone—we always came back. Apologies weren't just words; they were actions. She'd send me memes instead of saying sorry. I'd drop in her DMs with a "tu toh best hai yaar" even after a fight.

One day, we were sitting at the college stairs when she said, "Kabhi kabhi lagta hai na, ki sab kuch ruka hua hai, but jab tu hota hai toh sab theek lagta hai." That

one line stayed with me. Because I felt the same. When she was around, nothing else mattered.

There was one day—we sat under the tree near the canteen, talking about our past. I told her about the things that made me who I am. She listened—not with judgment, but with understanding. And when she shared her story, her wounds, her strength, I knew—this wasn't just any bond. This was something sacred.

We'd talk about silly things too—what we'd name our dog if we had one, where we'd go if we took a spontaneous trip, how we'd handle annoying relatives if we got married. It was all jokes, but somehow, it always felt like a preview of something real.

I remember one winter morning—we were both early to college. The cold breeze was biting, but she came with a small cup of tea for me from canteen . "Tu hamesha complain karta hai thand mein," she smiled.

That moment, I didn't just feel warm because of the tea—it was her thoughtfulness that melted me.

One evening, while walking past the college boundary wall, she suddenly stopped and said, "Tu sach main mera sab kuch ban gaya hai." I didn't say anything back. I just squeezed her hand gently. Because my throat had tightened. I was too full of emotion to speak.

But we still hadn't used the word "relationship." Maybe we were scared. Maybe we liked the undefined comfort. Or maybe we didn't want to jinx it.

But deep inside, we both knew what we were. What we had.

We were more than just friends. More than a label. We were a story that was still writing itself. We were a

feeling. A connection. A universe of two hearts trying to find their way in a chaotic world.

"You don't always need a label to feel loved; sometimes hearts understand what words cannot express."

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY

Chapter 6: The Most Beautiful Day

21st November—the day that would forever be etched in my memory. It was more than just a proposal; it was the day I poured my heart out and laid everything bare. I had spent days planning it, carefully arranging the moment I would finally tell Aarohi what she meant to me. With the help of my closest friends and a perfect excuse to get her alone, the stage was set.

She walked toward me, her eyes curious, unaware of what was about to happen. My heart raced with every step she took. I held a rose in my hand, the symbol of everything I felt but had never fully said. As I offered

it to her, I looked into her eyes and said the words I had rehearsed a hundred times, "I don't know where life is going, but I know it feels right when I'm with you."

Her reaction was everything I had hoped for and more. Tears welled up in her eyes, but there was a smile—a beautiful, accepting smile. She took the rose, and in that instant, everything changed. The moment was magical. I felt complete, like the universe had finally aligned in my favor.

We celebrated that moment together. A group of us went to a café, and though it was just a sandwich and casual photos, it felt like the most special meal of my life. Every little gesture, every glance, every smile felt like a thread weaving our lives closer together. That evening, we clicked pictures, laughed, and held hands as if the world belonged to us.

Later that week, we participated in the fresher's ramp walk together. A song played just for us as we walked

down the ramp, side by side, feeling like the leads of our own love story. She was a little nervous, but I held her hand, reminding her that we were in this together. That moment, like many others, turned into a memory I would carry forever.

That day wasn't just about a proposal; it was about promise. A promise of love, laughter, and togetherness. It was a day when love wasn't just said—it was felt in every heartbeat, in every touch, in every unspoken word between us.

One of my favorite memories was during the peak of winter. The air was cold, but our hearts were warm. I had short attendance during that time, and I called Aarohi and asked if she could meet me. Without hesitation, she said yes—and came along with her friend.

That day, we didn't have a plan. We just started walking and ended up on Airport Road. The wind was chilly, and I still remember how I turned to her

and said with a smile, "Today, you're going to ride the scooty."

She looked at me, surprised. "Me?"

"Yes, you," I laughed. "And I'll sit behind you."

And she did.

I sat behind her, holding her tightly because of the cold—and maybe because I just didn't want to let go. As we rode along the empty road, I felt the thrill of the moment and also a bit of fear—especially when she took those quick turns. But more than that, I felt safe. I felt happy.

At one point, I told her, "There's a temple nearby I've never visited. Would you go there with me?"

She smiled and nodded, and we started looking for it. We roamed through narrow lanes, turned corners, asked people. After walking and riding around for so

long, we finally reached the place. But unfortunately, the temple was closed.

Maybe God didn't want to see us that day. Or maybe… He just wanted to teach us that the journey matters more than the destination.

We smiled, shrugged, and turned back toward college.

December 31st. A date most people remember for parties, resolutions, or countdowns.

But for us? It became something we'd never forget.

We were the first to wish each other "Happy New Year" at midnight. I don't think either of us imagined how special that day would turn out to be. We were just happy to be with each other.

In the morning, we made a plan to watch a movie. We chose a morning show at 9:30 AM. The theatre

was almost empty—maybe five or six people. And our seats? Corner ones. Perfect.

She looked so beautiful that day. And I… I couldn't take my eyes off her.

The movie played on the screen, but I barely paid attention. My focus was on her smile, the way her eyes lit up when she looked at me.

We started clicking photos, trying to freeze the moment. And then, something just happened.

I leaned closer. She didn't move away.

We kissed.

Softly. Silently. Like the whole world had disappeared except for us.

After the kiss, we looked at each other and smiled—blushing like kids.

That wasn't our first kiss, though. I remembered the one before that too—after our fresher's party, in the parking area. She had kissed me then. It was quick, unexpected, and made me the happiest man alive.

That day, after the movie, we didn't go home. We walked around the mall for a while, hand in hand, just soaking in the joy of being together.

Later, we thought—"Let's go to the fair."

I didn't tell her I was afraid of heights. Or that I didn't really like sitting on rides.

But I didn't want to say no. Because if she wanted to go, then I wanted to go too.

We called our friends. They said they'd be late, so we decided to explore on our own.

We ate softy together, walked around the stalls, laughed at the silly Mickey Mouse mascot who was too short to look real. There wasn't much in the fair—just a few swings and food stalls. But with her, it felt magical.

Then we sat down to eat chole bhature. There was a cute little pitbull nearby wagging its tail. We were talking, laughing, enjoying our food when our friends finally called.

"Where are you guys?" they asked.

We told them the location. Soon, they joined us. And all of us had softy together again.

After a while, we started feeling tired. So we made another plan—to go to the Italian Garden.

It was crowded, but we didn't care. We went in, clicked photos, posed under trees, laughed till our stomachs hurt.

We took so many beautiful pictures that day—especially me and Aarohi. I still have those photos saved. They are not just pictures. They are proof that something beautiful existed. Something pure.

Evening fell. Calls started coming in from both our homes.

We had been out since 9 in the morning, and now it was almost 7.

She said, "You should go. I'll leave too."

But I knew the roads would be packed. It was New Year . And I couldn't let her go alone.

I smiled and said, "When your personal driver is right here, why worry?"

She giggled.

So we got on the scooty again. This time, I was driving.

The traffic was crazy. Horns everywhere. People rushing.

At one point, I said, "Imagine if you had gone alone… You'd still be stuck somewhere."

She didn't say anything. Instead, she hugged me from behind.

And in that moment, nothing else mattered.

I didn't care about the noise, the cold, or the delays.

I just wanted that moment to last forever.

As we neared her home, the sun was setting. We both watched it silently.

The sky was painted in shades of orange and pink.

It felt like the end of a beautiful movie.

As I dropped her off, she almost forgot my phone. I had kept it with her. She called out to me from behind, holding it out.

I turned, took it from her hand, smiled.

And walked away, carrying her presence like a whisper in my soul.

Some other beautiful days

31st October — a day I remember so clearly because it was the night before Aarohi's birthday. I had been waiting for this day, planning how I could be the very first person to wish her. It wasn't just about saying "Happy Birthday." It was about making her feel how much she meant to me. So, I posted a birthday story — a sweet and heartfelt note, along with a photo we had clicked on 14th October at the café. That picture

was special. We looked happy — genuinely happy — and the love in that frame wasn't something you could fake.

To my surprise, that story received an overwhelming number of likes. It wasn't just a birthday post anymore. It felt like the world around us — our friends, our people — had begun accepting us as a couple. And honestly, that acceptance meant a lot. It made me feel like I wasn't alone in this feeling. But still, a part of me was sad. College was closed on 1st November, and I couldn't meet her on her birthday.

But fate had a better plan.

Our college reopened on 6th November. Aarohi and I decided to celebrate not just her birthday, but also the birthday of our mutual friend, Riya, whose birthday had been on 2nd November. Both of them hadn't celebrated with a party, so we decided to make up for it. A random café plan was made. The

excitement bubbled as we left college together that day.

She sat behind me on the scooty — the same place where she always did, and yet every ride felt new when she was with me. I was smiling throughout. She held on gently, and that single gesture was enough to fill my heart.

When we reached the café, we were six friends in total. But I didn't care about the number. I just wanted her by my side — and she was. We sat together, ordered our favorite food, and laughed like we didn't have a care in the world. One of our friends started clicking candid photos from across the table. I remember looking at Aarohi, and she couldn't stop blushing. Her cheeks turned the softest shade of pink. Maybe it was because we looked good together. Maybe it was just the magic of the moment. But I knew she was happy.

We clicked so many pictures that day — some goofy, some sweet, but all filled with something unspoken between us. It wasn't just about poses. It was about the energy. We had started creating our own story, one frame at a time.

Then came 14th November — another day etched in my heart. We had planned a short getaway, lying to college that we had some academic reason to be absent. But the truth was, we just wanted to spend time together. Six of us headed toward a fort nearby, excited for a day out.

But sometimes, plans don't unfold the way you imagine. Though we reached the fort, something inside me didn't feel right. We were in a group, and I barely got time alone with Aarohi. I wanted to talk to her, walk with her, just be with her. But every moment felt divided. My mood began to sink. And yet, I didn't have the courage to tell her. I didn't want to be the reason her day was ruined. So I just stayed quiet, walking behind, pretending to be okay.

After the fort, we all felt hungry. We decided to grab some samosas, just something quick. But then someone said, "Let's go watch a movie." It was a sudden plan — spontaneous, wild, and exactly what we needed.

We all agreed.

And just like that, everything changed.

The movie theatre wasn't grand. The crowd wasn't loud. But sitting next to her, in the dim light, I felt something shift again. This was the first time I had ever watched a movie with a girl I truly liked. And not just liked — felt connected to.

During the movie, when the lights dimmed and the romantic scenes played, something happened. Our hands — almost unknowingly — began to inch closer. No words were spoken. No gestures made. But somehow, our fingers found their way to each

other. And when they finally touched, our eyes met briefly.

We both smiled. We both blushed. And we both held on.

It wasn't about the movie anymore. It was about this moment — this accidental magic that felt more real than anything else.

During the interval, we clicked more photos. This time, I saw something different in her smile. Something more open, more alive. After the movie, we took a group photo outside. Everyone looked happy. But I only cared about one face in that frame.

Her.

She was mine — even if we hadn't said it out loud yet.

That night, when I got home, I couldn't sleep. I replayed the entire day in my head like a film. The

ride, the café, the blushing, the missed moments at the fort, the samosas, the cinema, the touch of our hands. Everything.

It was another one of those beautiful days. Not because everything was perfect. But because everything was real.

And with her, even the most ordinary day felt like a festival.

"Real love isn't loud—it's found in quiet moments that echo in the soul forever."

WHEN

TRUTH BREAKS

TRUST

Chapter 7: When Truth Breaks Trust

Our story had become something beautiful, but beauty can be delicate—and one crack can change everything. It happened slowly, then all at once. The truth, which I had hidden in the shadows of fear, came to light. I had a past—a chapter I was never proud of. A relationship I never truly wanted, something that happened out of pressure and circumstance. One I tried to forget.

I had shared parts of it with Aarohi, but not all. I couldn't find the courage to tell her everything, especially the part that I had once been physically involved with someone. It wasn't love. It wasn't even willing. It was a part of my life I wanted to erase, not because I was guilty of what happened, but because it didn't define me. Or so I thought.

She found out from someone else. Not from me. And that broke something between us. She came to me, tears in her eyes, betrayal in her voice. "Why didn't you tell me?" she asked. And I stood there, speechless. Not because I had nothing to say, but because no excuse could fix what was broken.

I tried to explain. That I was afraid she'd look at me differently. That I wanted to protect our relationship from the burden of my past. But she didn't understand—and maybe she shouldn't have to. She deserved the truth, no matter how ugly it was. And I had failed to give it to her.

She began to pull away. The trust we had built so slowly was now slipping through our fingers. Our conversations became shorter, our moments colder. And I could feel her fading from me, like light retreating from the day.

One evening, I gathered the courage to ask her, "Do you still trust me?"

She looked away and whispered, "I don't know."

That hurt more than a slap. Because in that moment, I realized the depth of what I had done. It wasn't just about hiding a truth. It was about making her question the very foundation of what we had built together.

And yet, I still loved her.

I tried. I messaged her every night. I sent her long texts explaining my past, my fear, my regret. I poured my heart into apologies. Some she read. Some she didn't reply to. But I never stopped.

My friends told me to let it go. That if she couldn't understand, she didn't deserve me. But they didn't know Aarohi like I did. She wasn't wrong. She was hurt. And she had every right to be.

In college, things became awkward. We still crossed paths. Still had mutual friends. But now, when I saw her walking down the corridor, I no longer ran up to her with excitement. I just watched her from a distance, wishing things were different.

Once, during a group project, we had to sit beside each other. It felt like old times for a few minutes. She smiled at something I said, and my heart soared. But then the smile vanished, and the wall came back up.

I began to understand that forgiveness is not something you can force. It has to come from within. And trust? Once broken, it's harder to rebuild than love itself.

We met one last time—just the two of us.

I told her everything. Every detail. Every mistake. Every scar. I laid my soul bare. And when I was done, I said, "I don't expect you to forgive me. I just want you to know the truth from me."

She looked at me with teary eyes and said, "I believe you. But I don't know if I can forget."

That was the moment I knew. It wasn't hate. It wasn't revenge. It was pain. Deep, aching pain. And it wasn't just hers. It was mine too.

We sat in silence for a long time. No words. No plans. Just two hearts that once beat in rhythm, now unsure of how to say goodbye.

She left. And I stayed.

I stayed in the same place, the same memory, the same guilt.

They say time heals everything. But some wounds aren't meant to be healed. Some wounds become reminders. Of love. Of loss. Of lessons.

Aarohi was the best thing that ever happened to me. And also, the hardest lesson I ever had to learn.

I don't blame her. I never did.

If anything, I blame myself. For being scared. For not trusting her with my truth. For not believing that she could love even the broken parts of me.

I know now that love isn't just about sharing the beautiful moments. It's about sharing the scars too. And I failed to do that.

So here I am, alone with my memories. With her voice in my head. With her name on my lips. With a heart still waiting for a miracle.

I wished I could go back. I wished I had told her everything when I had the chance. But wishes don't fix broken hearts. And mine was starting to break too.

"The truth may hurt, but silence shatters."

THE NIGHT I LOST HER

Chapter 8: The Night I Lost Her

It was supposed to be just another evening. February 13th. That day was a little more special than others, though no one knew it would become such a turning point. It was a plan made the night before—one of our common friends invited a few of us to her house. It was meant to be casual. Just couples—me and Aarohi, Vihaan and his girlfriend (who happened to be our host). We decided we'd bunk college, just to spend a calm, happy day away from campus walls and distractions.

We reached her house late in the morning. The atmosphere was so simple, yet so full of warmth. It didn't feel like an escape—it felt like home. We sat together in the living room, talking about college life, cracking jokes, and reminiscing about the past few months.

Everyone was in a good mood. There were no tensions, no stress—just peace and presence.

After a while, hunger crept in, and naturally, it was the girls who headed into the kitchen. Aarohi, along with our host, went to prepare Maggi. I still remember the way they moved about in the kitchen—laughing, teasing each other, completely comfortable.

Vihaan and I just looked at each other and smiled. I couldn't help but say, "Bhai, dekh… biwiyan ban gayi hain. Dekh kitna pyaar se khana bana rahi hain hamare liye."

We started recording videos—funny, playful clips where we jokingly called ourselves proud husbands. "Yeh dekho humare liye Maggi ban rahi hai," I said to the camera. "Full husband-wife vibes aa rahi hai."

It was light-hearted, sweet, innocent fun.

Once the food was ready, we all gathered in the room again. Ate together. Shared plates. Shared smiles. There's something about sitting cross-legged on the floor, eating food your loved ones made for you. It brings a sense of comfort that no restaurant can match.

After the meal, we all relaxed in one of the rooms. The energy had shifted to something more personal, more tender. We started discussing dreams—where we saw ourselves in five years, what we'd do if life gave us a fresh chance. The conversation slowly turned toward love.

Love and what it meant to us.

It was during this time that I and Aarohi found ourselves close. Closer than usual. I looked at her. She looked back. There was no tension. Just silence that asked for one thing—closeness.

And then it happened.

We kissed.

Softly. Slowly. With love. Not rush.

It wasn't about passion. It was about connection.

A few minutes passed. We kissed again.

And again.

It felt like the world had slowed down. Like time had offered us a private pause—a chance to say things we hadn't said in words.

I remember resting my head on her lap, her fingers playing gently with my hair. We talked about how

good it felt to just "be." To not explain. To not justify. Just be in love.

That moment—those quiet minutes in that closed room—was one of the most beautiful, serene moments I've lived.

Eventually, the day had to move forward. The sun was beginning to fall. It was time to leave.

Aarohi looked at me, a soft tiredness in her eyes, but also happiness. She had spent the whole day with me, and we had laughed, touched, kissed, and loved in the purest way.

I told her, "Main tujhe chhod deta hoon. Din ho gaya hai."

She nodded.

So we said goodbye to our friends and left. The road was quiet, and the wind had picked up. I drove slowly, neither of us in a hurry to end the day.

We rode around, no fixed direction, just trying to hold onto that little bubble of time we'd created.

At one red light, I looked at her in the mirror. She was looking up at the sky, and then she looked at me and smiled. "Acha laga aaj," she said.

"Hmm," I replied. "Mujhe bhi. Bahut."

We didn't say much more after that. The silence spoke for us. And somewhere, deep down, I was already scared. Scared that moments like these don't come twice.

When we reached near her house, she hugged me from behind. Tight.

And in that hug, I felt it. A kind of goodbye I didn't want to believe in.

She got off the scooty. Walked inside.

That night, something inside me was off. I couldn't sleep. And then, without warning, our chats turned bitter. A small disagreement over something insignificant snowballed. My words were sharp. Hers were silent.

The warmth from earlier that day evaporated.

I tried calling her. She didn't answer.

I thought maybe she was overreacting. That by morning, things would be better. But what I didn't understand then was—when someone gives you their everything in silence, even your smallest words can shatter them..

Later that , I was involved in a minor accident. Physically, I wasn't hurt much. But mentally, I was shaken. I didn't know how to process it. So I went silent. I didn't answer her calls. I didn't text her back. I just froze. And that silence spoke louder than words.

She kept calling, again and again. Her voice notes were filled with worry, panic, confusion. And all I gave her in return was absence. I wanted to tell her what had happened. But I didn't. I don't even know why. Maybe I didn't want to scare her. Maybe I thought I'd explain everything the next day. Maybe I was just stupid.

On 15th February , The next morning, I had planned to surprise her. I had the rose, the gift—everything ready. But she wasn't the same anymore. She had cried all night. She thought I had ignored her, that I didn't care. And no matter how much I tried to explain, my silence had already done the damage.

That night, I lost her. Not to someone else, but to my own mistakes. And the saddest part? It didn't take a fight or a betrayal. Just silence. Just a missed moment.

But if I close my eyes now, I can still feel that 13th February evening. Her hands around my waist. The way she smiled when we left our friend's house. The way she called me "stupid" when I teased her. The

way she kissed me with her eyes closed like she was trusting me with her whole world.

And maybe that's why it hurts the most.

Because I didn't just lose her.

I lost the version of myself that she made better.

I lost the peace I found in her presence.

I lost a night that could've lasted a lifetime

"Sometimes we don't lose people. We just fail to hold on when it mattered most."

THE WAITING HEART

Chapter 9: The Waiting Heart

Days turned into weeks. Weeks into months. But the pain remained the same. Waiting—it's one of the most powerful and painful emotions a heart can endure. After that night on February 13th and the silence that followed, I found myself trapped in an endless loop of hope and heartbreak. I didn't know if we were over, or if we just needed time. But what I did know, deep inside, was that I wasn't ready to let go.

Valentine's Day came and went like a cruel joke. I ignored her calls, not because I didn't want to talk, but because I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to fix something I had broken with silence, with hesitation, with my own fear. Every hour that passed felt like a heavy stone placed on my chest.

The next few days were hollow. I would check my phone every few minutes hoping for a message, a notification, a voice note—anything that said she still cared. But there was nothing. Her profile picture was the same. Her status unreadable. And our chat? Frozen in time.

I started replaying everything in my head.

That day at her friend's house. Her laughter while making Maggi. The way she hugged me from behind on the scooty. Her soft kiss. Her smile. The silence.

I waited. Every day. Every night.

I would wake up hoping that maybe today she would forgive me. That maybe I'd open Instagram and see her story that would hint she missed me too. That maybe she'd text "I'm still here."

But all I got was silence.

And so, I did what most people do when they miss someone—they return to memories.

I opened our old chats. Read through our conversations like they were sacred scriptures. I watched our videos, the silly vlogs, the mirror selfies, the random snaps of her smile, her eyes, her messy handwriting.

I opened my gallery and looked at our Italian Garden pictures. I stared at the photo we took during the New Year's movie date. I would zoom in on her smile, and tell myself, "This was real. This happened. We were real."

But the longer I stared, the harder it became to believe that she would come back.

One night, I walked alone to the place we once stood together. The same sidewalk near the café where I gave her the rose on November 21st. I stood there, staring at the ground, wishing I could go back. Wishing I could take back that Valentine's Day. That silence. That fear.

I whispered her name into the cold air.

But only the wind answered.

Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into a month.

I started having dreams. Not nightmares. Just dreams of us being together.

Sometimes, it was us in the theatre again, watching that same movie. Sometimes, it was her lying next to

me, smiling, saying, "I missed you, Aarav." And sometimes, it was us in college, pretending nothing ever went wrong.

But each time I woke up, the emptiness hit harder. Because she wasn't there.

And I was still waiting.

There were times I picked up my phone to text her. Typed out a full message. And then deleted it.

Because what could I say? What could I explain that she didn't already know?

I kept hoping for a sign. Maybe she would reach out on her own. Maybe she was waiting for me too.

But the sign never came.

College felt different without her. The stairs we used to sit on. The class we always skipped. The café where we had chai. Everything reminded me of her.

I started avoiding those spots. Started avoiding people. Started avoiding myself.

The days blurred together. I still had responsibilities—classes, assignments, family—but I was only half-present. My body was there, but my soul was stuck on that night. On that hug. On that silence.

I tried to distract myself. Focused on internship work kept me busy during the day. But once the sun set, loneliness would wrap around me like a heavy blanket. Tried listening to music. Played video games. Even tried writing. But everything came back to her.

Every word. Every beat. Every sigh.

It was all Aarohi.

And I still waited.

My friends started asking, "Bhai, move on kar na."

But how could I? How do you move on from someone who never really left your heart?

She was everywhere. In my playlist. In my gallery. In my routines. In the way I still saved half of my chocolate thinking she might want it.

She was in the way I dressed better, just in case she saw me. In the way I turned my head whenever someone laughed like her. In the way my heart paused every time I saw her name online.

But I never messaged her. Not because I didn't want to. But because I didn't want to hear the final "no."

Hope was the only thing I had left.

And hope, sometimes, is crueler than heartbreak.

Every night, I would lie on my bed staring at the ceiling.

Thinking.

What if I had answered her call? What if I had shown up on Valentine's Day with flowers and said sorry? What if I had hugged her instead of hesitating?

Would she still be here?

Would we still be "us"?

I didn't have the answers. I only had questions.

And in those questions, I waited.

There's a kind of pain that doesn't scream. It just stays.

It doesn't break you loudly. It just eats away slowly.

I carried that pain like a second skin. Smiled for the world. Laughed with friends. Answered "I'm fine" every time someone asked.

But inside? I was still sitting on that scooty. Still holding her hand. Still hearing her voice say, "Don't leave me."

But I did. Not in body. But in silence.

And that silence took everything.

Still, I waited.

Because that's what love does. It waits. Even when it shouldn't. Even when it knows the door is closed.

It waits.

And my heart, foolish as it may be, kept waiting.

.I'd stare at our shared highlights on social media, wondering if she did the same. Wondering if she missed me even a little.

I blamed myself. Not because I was a bad person, but because I made bad choices. I let fear dictate my actions. I let silence destroy what love had built. And now, I was left with nothing but memories and regrets.

But even in that sadness, I held on to one thing—hope. A foolish, desperate hope that maybe one day, she would read this. That maybe one day, she would understand that my love was always real. That my heart still beats for her.

Because when love is true, it doesn't end. It just waits.

"Some loves don't end with goodbye. They end with waiting."

THE ECHO THAT REMAINS

Chapter 10: The Echo That Remains

Time has a strange way of moving forward while leaving certain memories stuck in place. No matter how much life pushes me ahead, a part of me is still standing in those old corridors, still smiling at her texts, still hoping to relive those moments. It's strange how love can continue to breathe even after it's been taken away.

People say, "Move on."

But how do you move on from someone who felt like home? How do you unlove the one person who gave meaning to everything? Aarohi wasn't just someone I loved. She was a part of me—stitched into my habits, my mornings, my late-night thoughts, my jokes, my college days, and even my silence. After it all ended, she didn't really leave. Her absence filled every space she once stood in.

The morning after it ended, I stared at my phone. Not in hope this time. Just in habit. I was used to seeing her texts. I was used to waking up to her "Good morning" with a heart emoji. But that day, there was nothing.

Every little memory—her laughter, the way she said my name, the way she looked when she was mad or shy—plays in my mind like a reel on repeat. And even though she's not here anymore, her presence hasn't left. She's

in my thoughts, in my habits, in the way I still wait for a message that might never come.

I've grown. I've learned. But I haven't forgotten. I don't want to. Because forgetting would mean that it didn't matter. And it did. It still does.

That's how it started. The void.

I tried convincing myself to stay strong. To move forward. To be logical. But the truth is, you can't be logical when your heart is grieving something it once believed was forever.

I kept seeing her everywhere. In the girl walking across the street with a braid like hers. In the Instagram song that autoplayed and matched our old story background. In the smell of Maggi that reminded me of that February 13th.

And worst of all—in my dreams.

In my dreams, she was still there. Smiling. Laughing. Holding my hand. Telling me to be less dramatic. Teasing me over my choice of shoes. Calling me "Aarav" like only she could.

But I'd wake up. Alone.

And the echo would return.

There's something people don't tell you about heartbreak—it doesn't always come in sharp, sudden bursts. Sometimes, it's soft. Lingering. It seeps into your routine. Into the way you walk slower, hoping to spot her from a distance. Into the way you stop listening to a song halfway through because it hurts too much. Into the way you type out a message and then erase it because you know it won't change anything.

And still, I held on. Not to the hope that she'd come back. But to the version of myself that was alive when she was around.

Because that version? He smiled more. He laughed louder. He looked forward to mornings.

Now, mornings were just the start of another day she wouldn't be part of.

It's strange how a person becomes a place. Aarohi wasn't just a girl anymore. She became a place inside me. A place I revisited every time I was alone. Every time I sat in the same college canteen where we once split a meggi . Every time I passed Airport Road where she drove the scooty and I held on tight because of the cold—and because I didn't want to let go.

I started writing letters I'd never send. To her. To myself. To the version of us that lived in my head.

I wrote things like:

"I'm sorry for the silence. I didn't know how loud it would become once you left."

"You're still in my playlists, my passwords, my poems."

"If love was a house, you were the warmest room."

"I miss you. Not to get you back. But to feel whole again."

People around me moved on. They talked about exams, internships, placements, Netflix shows.

But I was stuck in a loop. Rewinding. Replaying. Reliving.

Some nights, I'd find myself walking alone. Not to go anywhere. Just to be where no one would ask, "Are you okay?" Because the answer was complicated.

I wasn't okay. I was surviving. With her echo in my heart.

The echo is a cruel thing. It doesn't just replay her laughter. It replays your mistakes.

It reminds you of the day you hesitated. The moment you chose silence over honesty. The second you let pride win over vulnerability.

And then it asks, "What if?"

What if I had told her everything earlier? What if I hadn't missed that call? What if I had just shown up on February 14th?

Would she have stayed? Would she have forgiven me? Would I still be her Aarav?

But life isn't built on "what ifs." It's built on "what is."

And what is… is this: She's gone. We're over. And I still love her.

Not the dramatic, filmy love.. The kind that doesn't touch her favorite song because it hurts. The kind that remembers her laugh but forgets how to laugh without her.

And yet… I keep going. Because love doesn't always end in reunion. Sometimes, it ends in echoes. And sometimes… that has to be enough.

I still whisper her name when no one's around. I still check her Instagram when I know she won't notice. I still dream of writing a book she'll one day read.

Maybe she'll smile. Maybe she'll cry. Maybe she'll feel what I felt.

Maybe not.

But I'll write it anyway. Because the echo demands it.

It lives in my fingertips. In every word I write. In every silence I carry.

It is her.

And maybe she'll never come back. Maybe she doesn't think of me at all. Maybe she found peace where I only found pieces.

But this echo? It remains.

It teaches. It aches. It forgives. It remembers.

And as long as it remains, so will I.

"The heart remembers what the mind tries to forget."

IN ANOTHER LIFE, MAYBE

Chapter 11: In Another Life, Maybe

It was 7th August.
Honestly, that morning didn't feel like any other. My body was already weak; I had fever since the night before. The thermometer had shown something high, but I ignored it at first. You know how sometimes we think, "Bas thoda sa bukhaar hai, chhodo, theek ho jayega"? I thought the same. But my mind wasn't thinking about rest or medicine. It was stuck somewhere else on someone else. On **Aarohi**.

I don't know why, but even with fever, my heart was restless. I woke up early around 5 a.m. not because of the illness, but because my mind wouldn't stop replaying moments of her. I opened Instagram, and like a habit, my fingers went to my profile. I started watching her highlights one by one. I don't even

know how many times I've watched them before, but every time, it felt like the first time.

While lying there, thinking about her, I didn't realize something strange was about to happen. I started coughing. At first, I thought, "Thik hai, casual si khaansi hai, thoda thand lag gaya hoga." But then, after 2–3 coughs, it became stronger, sharper. My throat felt heavy, and then came that moment—when I spit… there was blood.

I froze. My mind went blank for a second. Blood? From me? I sat there, my heart suddenly beating fast, but not from love this time from fear.

I tried to calm myself. Told myself it's nothing. But deep down, I knew something was wrong. My body felt weaker than before, and my temperature was still burning high. I lay down again, hoping sleep would take me away from this fear, even for a little while.

When I woke up later, I decided to tell my family. I said, "Yeh problem ho rahi hai," and they immediately got worried. Within hours, we were at the doctor's. They did some tests—a blood report and a chest X-ray.

Blood report? Normal.
Chest X-ray? Not so normal.

The doctor didn't say much but recommended another consultation someone more experienced. That "someone" happened to be near my friend's hostel.

The next day, I was admitted. By then, my fever had climbed above 103°F. Everything felt hazy. My surroundings blurred in and out. I remember the sound of hospital machines, the faint smell of medicine in the air, and the white ceiling above me. My body felt heavy, my head spinning.

When evening came, I slowly began regaining more awareness. That's when I noticed the patient in the bed next to mine a man. His condition looked worse than mine. I didn't know his name, but I noticed everything.

And then she walked in. Not a nurse. Not a doctor. His wife.

She wasn't much older than me. Modern clothes, simple style. But the way she carried herself, the way she walked straight to him—it said everything. She sat beside him like it was the only place she belonged. She adjusted his blanket, checked his drip, spoke to the nurse about his medicines, and made sure every little thing he needed was right there.

She wasn't just "visiting" him. She was **living** that moment with him—his pain, his discomfort, his fight. She didn't move away even for a few minutes. The doctor would come, give instructions, and she would follow them exactly. If he needed medicine, she gave

it. If he needed food, she fed him. She handled bills, reports, everything. And when he seemed in more pain, she gently massaged his hands, trying to ease him.

Watching her, something inside me softened… and hurt at the same time. Because while I admired her, I couldn't stop imagining something else—**what if that was me?** What if it was *me* in that bed… and Aarohi in her place?

Would Aarohi stay with me like that?
Would she look at me the same way that woman looked at her husband—full of love, fear, and strength all at once?

That thought didn't leave me.

I started picturing it. Me lying there, weak, and Aarohi sitting beside me, her hand on mine, asking softly, *"Aarav, tum thik ho na?"* making sure I'm okay, making sure I'm not alone in this fight. The image felt so real

in my mind… but then reality reminded me—Aarohi wasn't here. She didn't even know I was sick.

And not because she wouldn't care—no. But because we had no way to talk anymore. No way to tell her, "Aarohi, Aarav is not okay. Can you come?"

That hurt more than the fever, more than the cough, more than the weakness in my body.

I closed my eyes, but my mind kept asking the same question over and over—*If things hadn't gone wrong between us… if we were still "us"… would she have been here?* Would she have stayed beside me all day, like that woman was staying for her husband? Would she have handled everything, from my medicines to my comfort? Would she have been my strength when I was too weak to stand on my own?

Somewhere deep in my heart, the answer was "yes." I believed she would have. I believed she would have done it without hesitation.

But belief doesn't change reality.

That night in the hospital felt longer than any night I've ever lived.

Outside, the world was quiet, but inside my head, everything was loud — memories of Aarohi, thoughts about "what if," the sound of my own heartbeat echoing in my ears. My fever wasn't letting me sleep, but honestly, even if it had gone away, I don't think I could have closed my eyes without her face flashing in my mind.

The room was dim, just one yellow light glowing faintly in the corner. The man in the bed next to me was asleep, but his wife was still awake, sitting beside him like she had promised herself she wouldn't move even for a second. Every now and then, she'd adjust his blanket, check his drip, or softly whisper

something to him — words I couldn't hear, but I could feel.

I turned my face away, not because I didn't want to see, but because every time I saw them together, a strange ache rose in my chest. My mind kept creating a picture — not of them, but of me and Aarohi in that exact place.

In my mind, I could see her — wearing something simple, maybe that white dress she loved, hair tied back in a loose bun. She'd walk in quietly, carrying a small bag with my favorite snacks "just in case" I felt like eating later. She'd sit beside me, not saying much, because she wouldn't need to. Just her being there would be enough.

I imagined her holding my hand — not tightly, but just enough for me to feel her warmth. She'd ask, *"Aarav, pain ho raha hai?"* and I'd shake my head, even if it did hurt, because I wouldn't want her to worry. She'd roll her eyes and say, *"Jhoot mat bolo,"* and then

she'd get up, pour water into a glass, and make sure I drank it.

I imagined the way she'd talk to the nurse — polite but firm, making sure every medicine was on time, every report was checked. She wouldn't just be there as a visitor. She'd be there like a part of me — the part that refused to let me face this alone.

And then reality hit again.

She didn't know I was here. She didn't know I was unwell. She didn't know that right now, more than any medicine, I wanted her by my side. And even if she knew… would she have come?

That was the question that wouldn't leave me.

I wanted to believe the answer was yes. I wanted to believe she'd drop everything, run to me, and stay — the way that woman was staying for her husband. But then another voice in my head whispered, *"What if she*

doesn't?" And that thought… that thought broke me in a way the fever never could.

I turned towards the wall, closed my eyes, and tried to fight back tears. Because I wasn't just fighting an illness — I was fighting the emptiness of her absence.

The beeping of the monitor next to me felt louder. The cold metal rail of the hospital bed felt harder. And in that moment, I realized — sometimes the real pain isn't in your body. Sometimes, it's in the space beside you that's left empty by someone you still wish was there.

I didn't know if morning would bring good news or bad news about my health. But I knew one thing — the suspense of not knowing whether Aarohi would have come… that was going to stay with me long after this fever was gone.

When morning finally came, it didn't arrive softly.

I woke up to the sound of footsteps and muffled voices in the corridor, the smell of disinfectant stronger than usual. My fever had dipped a little, but my body still felt heavy, like it was carrying more than just sickness. My first instinct wasn't to check my temperature or ask the nurse about my reports. My first instinct was to check my phone.

Maybe, somehow, there'd be a missed call from her. Maybe a message. Something.

Nothing.

The screen was blank except for the usual forwarded good morning texts from people I barely spoke to. No "Aarav, are you okay?" No "Where are you? I'm coming."

I put the phone down slowly, staring at the ceiling. The couple in the bed next to me were awake too. The man's wife was gently feeding him something

from a small steel bowl. She'd blow on each spoonful before bringing it to his lips, making sure it wasn't too hot. It was such a simple act, but it felt like the purest thing in the world.

I couldn't look away.

Every time she tucked the blanket around him, I imagined Aarohi's hands doing that for me. Every time she smiled at something he said, I imagined Aarohi's smile — that real one she had, where her eyes lit up before her lips even moved.

But the more I imagined, the more I realized something that stung — this wasn't just about wanting her to care for me in that moment. This was about wanting a life where she would always be there to care for me, and I for her.

And maybe that's what hurt the most.

Because deep down, I knew we had once been close enough for that to be possible. Close enough to

picture a future like that without it feeling impossible. But somewhere along the way, trust broke, words were left unsaid, and we ended up in different corners of the same city — far enough to not even know when the other person was unwell.

I took a slow breath and looked away, pretending to adjust my bedsheet so no one could see the tears starting to form. Fever makes you weak, but missing someone makes you weaker.

The nurse came in to check my vitals, and I nodded absently to her questions. But my mind was still replaying the same scenario — over and over — *What if she knew? Would she have come? Would she have sat here through the night, even if we weren't talking the way we used to? Would she have stayed just to make sure I was okay?*

The answer kept changing in my head.

Some moments, I believed she would. I remembered the way she once scolded me for not eating breakfast,

the way she'd notice when I was tired even before I said anything. That version of Aarohi — yes, she'd have been here.

Other moments, doubt took over. I remembered the fights, the silence, the messages left on read. That version of Aarohi — maybe she wouldn't.

And that uncertainty… I will never know. And not knowing has a way of staying with you forever.

When the doctor came in with my test results, I listened carefully, but my heart wasn't in it. All I could think was how life has a strange way of showing you what you're missing — not by giving it to you, but by placing it right in front of your eyes, in someone else's story.

Even now, few days later, when I think about that day, it's not the fever I remember. It's not the bitter taste of the medicine or the cold sting of the injection.

It's the image of that couple. It's the way she stayed beside him, through the night, through the discomfort, through the fear. And it's the way I sat there wondering — *If Aarohi and I had never broken, if our story had gone differently… would that have been us?*

That question still follows me. Maybe it always will.

The day I was discharged from the hospital should have felt like relief.
It didn't.

They wheeled me out into the sunlight, but the world didn't look bright. It looked distant, like I was watching life from behind a glass window. My body was lighter without the IV drips and the hospital smell clinging to me, but my mind carried something heavier — the emptiness of a visit that never happened.

Every patient around me was being received by someone. A brother, a mother, a friend… someone who had been waiting for them to come out. My ride home was a quiet one. The car windows were rolled down, the wind brushing my face, but all I could think about was *how easy it would have been for her to call, to ask, to just… be there.*

When I reached home, my room felt strangely unfamiliar. The bed was made, everything was in its place, but I couldn't shake off the feeling that something was missing. I lay down, staring at the ceiling fan spinning slowly, and my mind went right back to the hospital.

That couple's faces wouldn't leave my head. The way she would lean in and whisper something to him. The way he would smile even through the pain. The way her presence seemed to make the hospital room less like a place of sickness and more like a place of healing.

And every time I thought about it, the same thought returned — *Why wasn't Aarohi there?*

I wanted to tell myself that she didn't know, that if she had known she would have come running. But there was this other voice — the one that remembered how we had left things, the misunderstandings, the silence — and it whispered, *Maybe she wouldn't have.*

The days after I got home blurred together. I was supposed to be resting, but rest is hard when your mind keeps replaying old memories.

I thought about the times when she *was* there for me. The time she noticed I was quieter than usual and kept asking until I told her what was wrong. The time she insisted I eat something, even when I said I wasn't hungry, and ended up feeding me herself just to make sure I did. Those moments felt so real, so strong — how could they not mean she would have been there now?

But then I'd remember the last few weeks before we drifted apart. How quickly messages turned from long paragraphs to one-word replies. How calls became rare, and laughter even rarer. How I had been holding on to the hope that we'd fix things, but maybe she had already let go.

I didn't want to think this way, but I couldn't stop. That's the thing about illness — it doesn't just weaken your body; it gives your thoughts too much time to roam where they shouldn't.

At night, I'd lie awake, the fan spinning above me, the streetlight casting faint shadows on my wall, and I'd picture an alternate version of my life. In that version, she knew I was sick. She came to the hospital, maybe with that worried crease in her forehead she always got when something bothered her. She sat next to me, asked how I was feeling, maybe scolded me for not taking care of myself.

And in that version, I didn't just get better physically. I healed in ways no medicine could touch.

But that version only lived in my head.

Reality was different. Reality was silence.

Even when I started feeling better physically, the thought stayed with me like a shadow. or scrolling aimlessly through my phone, and suddenly the image of that hospital night would return. Not the fever, not the pain — but that woman's hand resting on her husband's, her presence wrapping around him like a promise.

And I'd find myself wondering all over again — *If Aarohi and I had never broken apart, if that distance had never formed between us, would she have been that hand on mine? Would she have stayed through the night, just to make sure I was okay?*

I don't know if I'll ever get the answer.

Maybe some questions are meant to stay unanswered — not because the answer doesn't exist, but because it exists in a timeline we'll never reach.

And so, I carry that suspense with me. Not just about whether she would have been there for me in that moment, but about what our story could have been if life had unfolded differently.

It's a quiet ache. The kind that doesn't scream, but stays — patient, persistent, and unshakable.

It had been months.
Months since the hospital.
Months since the fever, the x-rays, and the quiet nights where my thoughts looped endlessly between *she would have come* and *maybe she wouldn't have.*

Life had moved forward, or at least that's what I told everyone. I got busy with work, with friends, with the daily routines that keep you from drowning in your own mind. But no matter how much noise I

surrounded myself with, there was always that silent space in my chest — the one that carried her name.

My heart was already racing, and my mind was back in the hospital — imagining how she would have looked if she had been there, sitting beside me, caring for me like that woman cared for her husband.

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That was it.

And I still didn't have the answer.

Maybe that life exists somewhere — in a parallel world, in a dream I haven't woken up from yet, or in a memory I haven't lived.
But it's not here.
Not in this version of us.

Here, there is silence.
Here, there is distance.

And here, there is me — carrying the weight of a question I will never be able to answer.

In another life, maybe…
She would have been here.
She would have stayed.
And maybe, just maybe… we would have never let go.

"Love doesn't heal you with words. It heals you with presence."

Acknowledgements

'Writing this book wasn't easy. It meant bleeding onto paper, revisiting memories that once brought smiles and now bring silence. But through it all, I found strength—not just in myself, but in the people who stood beside me when I didn't have the words.

To **Aarohi** —
You were never just a part of my life; you were the chapter that changed everything.
Though you may never read this, your presence is hidden between every line of this story.
Thank you for the moments, the laughter, the quiet glances, and even the heartbreak.

Without you, this book wouldn't have been written. Without you, I wouldn't have discovered what love—and loss—can truly mean.

To my **closest friends**, who patiently listened to my late-night overthinking, reread the same drafts, and never made me feel like my pain was too much to share—thank you. You became my family when I couldn't even be a friend to myself.

To my **readers**—if you've ever loved someone deeply, if you've ever lost someone silently, if you've ever waited without a reply—I see you. I hope this story reminds you that you're not alone.

To the **one who encouraged me** to turn my pain into purpose, to convert memories into meaning—thank you for showing me that broken hearts still have a voice.

And to the version of me who kept writing even when the tears blurred the screen—

You did it.
You turned love into legacy.
And pain into poetry.

This book is for everyone who's ever had to say goodbye without wanting to.
This is more than a story.
It's a piece of my soul.

With love,
Koko

Closing Note

Some stories end.
Some stories fade.
And some stories… stay.

If you've reached here, you've just walked with me through a journey that was not always easy to tell. These were not just chapters of a book — they were pieces of my heart, my mistakes, my hopes, my memories.

You've met my smiles and my silences. You've seen the moments I wanted to hold forever and the ones I wish I could forget. You've seen how love can be both a gentle hug and a quiet ache.

Aarohi will probably never read this. And maybe it's better that way.
But if she ever does… I hope she knows this was never just about loss. It was about love. The kind of love that changes you, even when it doesn't stay.

If you're reading this, maybe you've loved someone like that too — someone who taught you what your heart was capable of, even if they couldn't stay to see all of it. If so, I hope you remember: love doesn't have to last forever to be real.

Thank you for holding my story in your hands.
Thank you for keeping my words alive.

This may be the last page of this book… but it's not the last page of me.

Kunal Koko

From the Author's Heart

When I started writing this book, I didn't know if I was telling a love story, a heartbreak story, or just my own truth. Maybe it's all of them. Every page here carries a piece of my heart, moments I've lived, memories I've replayed a thousand times, and feelings I could never say out loud — until now.

This is not just a story about me and Aarohi. It's about the little things we often take for granted — the smiles, the fights, the waiting, the care, the words left unsaid. It's about how love changes you, how it stays even when people don't, and how some memories refuse to fade no matter how much time passes.

I didn't write this for sympathy or attention. I wrote it because some feelings deserve to be given a place to live forever, and for me, that place is here — in these

pages. If even one person reads this and feels less alone in their own story, I'll know it was worth it.

And to the person who inspired all of this — Aarohi — you will probably never know how much you've shaped me, how much of you is hidden between my words. This book will always be for you, even if you never read it.

Thank you, dear reader, for holding my story in your hands. In some way, you're now part of it too.

— **Kunal Koko**

For reader

If you've made it till here, I want to say something — not as an author, but as a human being who shared a part of his heart with you.

These pages weren't just words for me; they were pieces of my life. Some were soft and warm, others sharp and heavy. Writing them felt like reliving each moment — the laughter, the silences, the mistakes, the love, and the loss.

Maybe you saw a reflection of yourself in these pages. Maybe you remembered someone you once loved. Or maybe you simply turned the pages without expecting to feel anything, but still… something stayed.

If there's one thing I hope you carry from this book, it's this — love is never wasted. Even if it changes shape, even if it doesn't last the way you thought it would, it still leaves you with something valuable.

Thank you for letting me tell my story. Thank you for holding it in your hands, and in a small way, holding me too.
And if somewhere in your life, there's a person you've been meaning to call, message, or meet — maybe this is your sign.

Because sometimes, "later" never comes.

— *Koko*